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Proposed South Dakota Certified Grade Program for Eggs

Boyd J. Bonzer¹

The South Dakota Egg Marketing Task Force made up of four producers, two producer-packers, three egg packers and three hatcherymen promoted a change in the egg law during the last legislative session and a change in the marketing regulations to include a South Dakota Certified Grade of eggs. As a result, the legislature passed a change in the egg law that would permit the State Department of Agriculture to regulate production and marketing practices at the farm level.

After the legislative session, members of the Task Force worked with the office of the Secretary of Agriculture to write proposed regulations for the new grade. As a result of a hearing in Pierre, May 30, 1974, the Secretary of Agriculture did not adopt the part of the proposed regulations that would have established the new certified grade.

Later, on July 7, the Secretary of Agriculture attended a meeting of the Task Force and encouraged them to reevaluate the proposed regulations for a South Dakota Certified Grade and asked for another hearing. To date this has not been done.

The proposed South Dakota Certified Grade regulations would require all eggs sold by retail stores or used by institutional consumers such as restaurants, boarding houses, bakeries, etc. to be produced by South Dakota certified flocks and be of a South Dakota grade or meet South Dakota grade "A" or "B" standards if imported. Some certification requirements at the farm level include confinement of birds, cooling of the eggs, egg washing practices and labeling of packages. If the certified program is adopted as presently proposed, it would affect many segments of the industry as well as the consuming public.

One-fourth of the state's production will be affected. During 1973, South Dakota produced 785 million eggs. This was 1178 eggs for each of the estimated 666,257 men, women and children in the state. The average per capita consumption for the nation during 1973 was 294 eggs so South Dakota consumers probably used the equivalent of about one-fourth of the eggs produced in the state and shipped out about three-fourths of the production. Eggs that are packed for out of state shipment would not be included in the Certified Program.

Effect on the consumer. Consumers would be assured of being served a graded egg in all restaurants, boarding houses, nursing homes and food manufacturing plants in the state and all South Dakota retail stores would offer only graded eggs to their customers.

¹ Extension Poultryman.

Many people are of the opinion that dependable quality would build confidence in eggs, increase the consumption of eggs as a high quality protein food and result in a higher return for the egg producer.

Effect on the producer. The producers who certify their flocks would be required to carry on good egg handling practices. This would include cooling to 60° F. or less, confining the birds so they will take in a uniform diet, using controlled washing conditions and identifying their eggs as they move through the market. Generally, the production and marketing practices for most of the flock-owners with more than 500 or 600 layers would not change. Those persons with smaller flocks would be required to perform the same egg quality saving practices as those with larger flocks.

By the end of July, the State Department of Agriculture had issued Class "A" licenses to 32 producers with more than 3,000 layers and Class "C" licenses to 178 producers with less than 3,000 layers, who pack and sell eggs to stores, restaurants, boarding houses, nursing homes, etc. It is assumed that most of these 210 producer-packers who are now licensed would become certified and continue to sell eggs. In addition to this, many of the 367 other class "A" dealers and 32 class "B" license holders who are dealers would purchase eggs from South Dakota Certified flocks for the pack they deliver to their South Dakota outlets. If the number of additional flocks certified would average only two per dealer, it would add another 800 certified flocks in the state for a grand total of 1,000 producers affected.

Effect on the dealer. South Dakota dealers could pack only eggs from certified farms in the cartons or cases marked with a South Dakota Certified Grade for sale to South Dakota retail stores and institution outlets. Other eggs could be imported for these outlets if they measure up to South Dakota grade standards.

South Dakota packers would also be required to mark all containers of certified eggs with their name and address and the date packed.

Effect on administration. Presently, there are three full-time egg inspectors who are charged with administering the egg law in the field at the dealer level. They receive some help from the state public health officials who routinely inspect restaurants, nursing homes, boarding houses and food manufacturing plants. These three inspectors would be charged with administering the certified program in addition to their present load.

Remarks. When the task force asks for another hearing on the proposed South Dakota certified egg program, there should be adequate time for publicity to be sent out to explain the details of the program so the public who are concerned will understand the program before the hearing takes place.